
Team Leader Course

3d Battalion, 75th Ranger Regiment

COMMAND SERGEANT MAJOR RALPH R. BEAM

Developing leaders, particularly non-commissioned officers, is the highest priority noncombat mission of an effective Army unit. Competent, caring, dedicated, and intelligent NCO leaders will determine its long-term success.

Team leaders are the ones who literally walk the point and lead the way for the soldiers, and they are directly responsible for the performance of most of an infantry battalion's men and firepower. If they fail in any aspect of the job, the battalion may fail in its mission within the brigade and division. Yet these positions of critical responsibility always fall to the most junior and least experienced NCOs. The increased operational tempo, the higher complexity of operations other than war, and the rapid fielding of new, sophisticated equipment work together to demand ever more of our junior NCOs.

The process of team leader development is a matter of experience and observation. Soldiers learn it by watching their own NCOs, good and bad, or they learn it by a crash course given under fire where experience is paid for in blood. In either case, experience is a function of time, place, and fortune—dictating whether a team leader continues to operate with critical gaps in his abilities or emerges with well-rounded knowledge and comprehensive skills.

The Army has made great strides in building the institutional side of the Noncommissioned Officer Development Program (NCODP) through the Primary Leadership Development Course (PLDC). But relying solely on the PLDC to establish the base is not

enough. The first step is a chain of command that understands the importance of a properly resourced leader training program. In the 3d Battalion, 75th Ranger Regiment, our priority leader training program focuses on the team leader. This program is geared to meet the unit's needs while preparing its team leaders to be rounded out by PLDC attendance.

During a command review of our battalion goals, the leaders of the 3d Battalion identified the need for quicker development of its junior NCOs as the top goal for the battalion. The leaders immediately laid out a course of action made up of two components.

The first was to ensure that platoon leaders, platoon sergeants, and squad leaders were actively teaching and

In the 3d Battalion, 75th Ranger Regiment, our priority leader training program focuses on the team leader.

evaluating leader tasks at all levels of METL (mission essential task list) training. This was relatively easy because the battalion's intense training schedule provides an opportunity for all Rangers to develop expertise in critical individual and collective tasks. The junior NCOs were technically and tactically competent soldiers, but were not prepared with the knowledge they needed to perform all of the many tasks demanded of them.

The second component was to develop a unit-specific team leader training course; this part—the task of taking

good soldiers and making them good NCOs—was more difficult and took longer to implement. The truth is that there is a big gap between being a good soldier and being a good NCO. A good soldier knows what to do; a good NCO knows how to teach and lead his troops to do the right thing. The outcome of our course of action had to be training our fire team leaders to teach and lead.

At the end of the command review, the battalion commander charged the battalion command sergeant major (CSM) with the task of building a program that would speed the transition from good soldier to good NCO for the battalion's fire team leaders.

The CSM canvassed the first sergeants and platoon sergeants for topics they thought should be included in the 3d Battalion Team Leader Course. These senior NCOs looked at what they expected their fire team leaders to be able to do, at the level of professional education in most of the prospective students (most would not yet have attended PLDC), and at a realistic number of hours that could be devoted to the course without detracting from other training events. Then they gave the CSM their best estimates of the topics that needed to be covered. The CSM took this list of topics, compared it to the guidelines in Army Regulation 350-17, *Noncommissioned Officer Development Program*, and Training Circular 22-6, *The Army Noncommissioned Officer Guide*, and decided upon the essential subjects the course would cover.

These topics, which were also directly related to unit shortcomings, ad-

dressed the unit's character and culture. The classes are focused on specific team leader tasks. They try to show the team leader how he fits into the various Army systems and the important role he must play in making all of those systems work.

For instance, one of the essential skills of a good NCO is effective counseling—the Ranger's individual after-action review. To be an effective counselor, however, an NCO must know how to apply Field Manual (FM) 22-101, *Leadership Counseling*, and not just how to answer promotion board questions drawn from it. He must be able to practice the skills of listening, watching, responding, and guiding. These skills are demonstrated and practiced during scenario-driven role-playing exercises. The main thrust of the counseling class is to teach a team leader to develop good soldiers and bond strong teams. This skill was judged so critical that it was allotted the course's largest block of time.

Another example of targeting the class to its students is its introduction to training management. Although the instruction touches on the training management cycle from FM 25-101, *Battle Focused Training*, its primary focus is to teach team leaders the relationships among the battalion and company METLs, the platoon critical collective tasks, and the critical individual tasks they are responsible for training. The class shows students how to use the ARTEP mission training plan manuals to identify individual tasks to train and evaluate. It also shows them how they fit into the training management cycle and how they can influence what appears on the weekly training schedule.

The class on physical profiles covers the battalion's profile physical training program and shows the team leader how to read and implement profiles. The aim is to enable team leaders to help their soldiers through rehabilitation without violating their profiles. It shows how to tailor post-profile training to get the fastest, most complete recovery for a soldier.

Many of the third day's classes move out of the classroom to deal with tacti-

cal issues, but they are still focused on training the team leader on how to be a trainer. The class on battle drills does not have to teach them the *React to contact* battle drill—they already know how to do it. The class discusses how to prepare and execute their training sessions with their troops, how to actually do the *crawl, walk, run* train-up in the drill. The other classes cover pre-combat inspections, sector sketches, fire commands, and after-action reviews. With each class, the team leader is given a memory aid, checklist, or diagram for future use.

Finally, the team leaders receive a class on maintenance. This enables them to better supervise their soldiers in operator-level preventive maintenance checks and services, on filling out DA Forms 2404 correctly, and how to follow up on all assigned weapons and equipment.

It would have been simple enough just to assign instruction of these various classes to NCOs, but that would not

A good soldier knows what to do; a good NCO knows how to teach and lead his troops to do the right thing.

have guaranteed the desired standardization of knowledge and experience from course to course. Instead, senior NCOs prepared lesson plans, examinations, and handouts for the classes. The experience the NCOs have gained as instructors or writers in other assignments resulted in lesson plans with clearly stated terminal learning objectives and tasks, conditions, and standards. Showing the team leaders that even classroom instruction is performance-oriented training helps to set the right example for presenting their own classes.

Since Ranger culture includes strong NCO leadership and subject matter expertise, the CSM, the first sergeants, or the platoon sergeants teach the classes. By having the most senior NCOs in the battalion teaching these subjects, the students receive some impression of the importance of the topics. To ensure smooth, professional presentations, the

instructors practice. Before giving a class the first time, they rehearse the class for the CSM and the first sergeants. Occasionally, an officer subject matter expert presents a class, but student critiques invariably favor NCO presentations, indicating that some subject matter should be left to the NCOs.

Team leaders in the course receive a loose-leaf notebook with handout materials ranging from extracts from Army Regulations, FMs, ARTEPs, battalion and regimental policy letters, standing operating procedures (SOPs), checklists, diagrams, and forms. This material is continually updated from one course to the next. When something is added or updated, all previous graduates of the course also receive the additions. (The team leader course handout book has become an eagerly sought item, with squad leaders and even platoon sergeants casting envious eyes on their team leaders' books.)

The CSM conducts a written critique by the students at the end of each course. The CSM and first sergeants review all critique sheets and make additions or deletions to the course or handouts as required.

The first and second courses were used to train team leaders who were already in position, along with selected specialists identified as future leaders. The third course was opened to leaders in low-density MOSs.

The Team Leader Course is an integral part of the battalion's NCO management program, which ensures that future Ranger NCO leaders will continue to lead the way in the Army. The program consists of a counseling program, a 90-day reception and integration board, a unique promotion board process, and an 18-month performance review board. Further, the CSM uses an NCO management worksheet that lists current duties, projected duties, and projected schooling to prepare for new assignments. The worksheet is a product of the counseling and board process.

The component pieces of the management program complement each other. For example, the sergeant/staff sergeant promotion board draws its

questions and scenarios from unit SOPs, troop-leading procedures, and team leader training courses, as well as Army publications.

NCO responsibility is reinforced through the promotion board process of having the first-line supervisor stand before the board before the candidate arrives. The supervisor briefs the board on the candidate's background and experience and the reason he is being recommended for promotion. The supervisor also presents the candidate's counseling file to the board to support his qualifications for promotion. The cause and effect of training is clear to the board, the sponsoring NCOs, and the candidate. If the candidate is well prepared and excels, both he and his NCO chain of command are rewarded. If the candidate is unprepared, he and his NCO chain of command receive appropriate counseling. Regardless of the outcome, the responsibility of the Ranger NCO's chain of command to train and develop him is clear and the feedback is immediate. Although the board process may take a bit longer, it is a privilege to join the Ranger NCO corps, and this privilege is not taken lightly.

In addition to promotion boards, the battalion conducts a performance review board at 90 days and 18 months in position. Ninety days after an NCO is

assigned to a position, he stands before a board of battalion senior NCOs, which reviews his integration into the battalion and his initial performance in the position. The NCO presents his overall assessment of the element he leads and his goals for the next 13 months based on its observed strengths and weaknesses. These goals are reviewed by the board and placed in his counseling file, where they become the basis for periodic counseling during the next 13 months.

The 18-month performance review board reviews these goals, the element's counseling files, and its training records and determines whether the NCO and element are still on track and performing to standard. The board also discusses the NCO's career path, examining his current position, possible position options, promotions, schools, and personal goals.

The entire NCO development program is an integrated, systematic, and living process. As changes are required, the program is adjusted to meet future needs. The most important element of this program is its source—it is developed and executed by NCOs.

As a result, the process builds trust and confidence in the NCO corps. The combined effects of the components of the leader training program have made it successful beyond initial goals, which

were to bring the NCOs up to the level required in the fast-paced environment of a Ranger battalion. The whole NCO development process has enabled the 3d Battalion to develop NCOs who are not just good Rangers but good NCOs capable of setting and enforcing the standard throughout the Army.

The development process for our team leaders is to identify them, send them through the team leader course, put them into position, evaluate their performance, send them to the promotion board, and then complete the process with the PLDC. The course has allowed the unit to transmit all SOPs and standards with one voice. These new team leaders speak with the same voice and build the team to the same standard we have given them. We owe it to them to provide them with the base of knowledge and the tools to conduct the required tasks to standard. The emphasis of this course is to teach our most critical junior leaders how to think, not what to think. Too many lives depend on their being able to do their job right, the first time.

Command Sergeant Major Ralph R. Beam is assigned to the 3d Battalion, 75th Ranger Regiment, where he has served in positions from platoon sergeant through command sergeant major. He is a graduate of Troy State University.
